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Then and Now

The Story of Forty Years

1870-1910



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Written for the Biennial Assembly, held in the First Presbyterian Church, Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, April 27th, 1910.

IN 1870, Presbyterians were more averse to innovations than now, and it must have been somewhat in the nature of a shock when the Board of Foreign Missions heard that some women in Philadelphia wanted to organize themselves into a Missionary Society to help—save the mark!—to *help* that Board with its work among women and children.

No time was lost by the Board in sending one of its Secretaries, Dr. Irving, from New York, to talk it over with a meeting of pastors and ladies convened for the purpose, and the next month, just as the first article of a tentative constitution was read, Dr. J. C. Lowrie, of the Board, was announced, and addressed the meeting. The minutes record that he questioned the propriety of an independent organization, and thought the work could be more easily, cheaply and better done through the agencies now employed by

the Church; but inasmuch as he closed by saying he thought it safe to leave the matter in the hands of the ladies, the constitution was taken up just where it had been left at his appearing. One after another the articles were voted upon, and later they were submitted to the Executive Committee of the Board of Foreign Missions for approval.

Thus the precious scheme was launched, the Board looking on with alarm, yet with an open mind, the pastors with few exceptions so suspicious that one of them insisted on being present at a meeting in his church, "Because," he said, "no one knows what these women would pray for if left alone!" and the very sextons asking excitedly, "Is this one of those Woman's Rights affairs?"—for just then, as now, the air was charged with cries for equal suffrage for women.

The Presbyterian Church no longer fears innovations—it courts them. Women's Foreign Missionary Societies are even thought by some to be old-fashioned; while the newest thing out is *Men's* Missionary Meetings—The Laymen's Movement. If this goes on, we can soon follow Paul's advice in missionary affairs as well as in other matters: "If women will learn anything let them ask their husbands at home."

If you expect to hear that the beginnings of our dear Society were small and the progress slow, you will be disappointed, for it seemed to spring full-sized like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. Our first

missionaries, Miss Craig and Miss Dickey (afterward Mrs. Tracy), were in India, and in six months after our organization we had under our care more than half the women missionaries connected with the Board of Foreign Missions. Of these, Miss Noyes and Mrs. Nevius still work in China; Mrs. Wilder in India, and Miss Dascomb in Brazil.

The need of a Field Secretary was realized almost at once, and temporary ones were secured. For twelve years (1873-1885) we were so fortunate as to have Miss Loring, a former missionary in Syria, who is now Mrs. William M. Taylor, of Bartow, Georgia. A recent letter from her describes her extraordinary perils and pleasures as she travelled about organizing 718 Societies. Do we not owe her a debt of gratitude?

We were in such haste to have an Annual Meeting that it was held six months after our organization, though a full year after the preliminary meetings. Moreover, *annual* meetings seem not to have been enough, for they were preceded by "Anniversaries," and followed by semi-annual meetings in October. Is it because our blood runs more sluggishly now that a Biennial Assembly suffices? No, but because our many splendidly organized Presbyterial Societies hold annual meetings well fitted to uplift and educate without the yearly presence of the Parent Society, and thus much money and labor are saved.

At that first Annual Meeting, April 21, 1871, sixty-two Auxiliaries and Bands had sprung into existence,

supporting fifteen missionaries (besides native teachers and schools), while more than \$5,000 had come into the treasury. To-day we report 4,211 Societies, old and young, supporting 231 missionaries, and contributing \$181,353; while the total gifts since our organization amount to \$5,405,000. Of all the missionaries who have been our representatives, eleven are here to rejoice with us at our Fortieth Anniversary, and 220 are bearing the burden and heat of the day, while

“For all the saints who from their labors rest,
Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blest!”

If the Board of Foreign Missions had eyed us skeptically in those first few months, it is but fair to say they soon welcomed us blithely as colleagues and somewhat rapidly unloaded upon us new enterprises, which, it seems from the minutes, we invariably accepted. (I quote from Mrs. S. C. Perkins.) School buildings, homes for missionaries, hospitals, type for the Bible in Laos, the purchase of Woodstock in India, a boat for missionary use, medical instruments, famine funds, and, in one instance, the actual founding of a station—all these objects, and many more, were proposed, accepted and accomplished during the first ten or fifteen years of our history. Moreover, having been good, loyal children, and having laid out our work on strictly Presbyterian lines, we had each year cordial endorsement by the General Assembly, and in every report of the Standing Committee on Foreign

Missions our labors were distinctly acknowledged and approved.

Thus events followed fast, yet there were a few things which came so slowly as to be unaccountable did we not remember how our founders shrunk from publicity. There was no printed report the first year, save two pages in *Woman's Work for Woman*, and when the second year one of eighty pages was printed, the names of the "Managers" (now called Directors) were not included in the first edition. Was it because of their dislike to see or to have husbands and fathers see their names in print? Again, they record only *silent prayer* in the minutes of the first meetings—unless indeed a man was brought in to lead in prayer—and in the public meetings no woman seems to have made an address until in April, 1872, Miss Nassau, of Africa, and Mrs. House, of Siam, broke the silence.

But if the prayers were not at first audible, they were none the less incessant, and only by reason of this has the Society thriven. As early as 1871, the Managers recommended that the hour between five and six on Sunday evening be devoted to prayer for missionaries and for our efforts to aid them. Since 1874, the third Tuesday morning of the month has seen us assembled for the same purpose. Prayers and letters, letters and prayers!—we have been nourished on them and have tried to help the Master feed the five thousand, the many times five thousand of our constituents, with the same angel's food.

Speaking of letters, it is pleasant to catch glimpses in the minutes of the excitement caused by receiving the first missionary letter in April, 1871. It was from Miss Hattie Noyes, of Canton, unfolding her plans for a Girls' School and asking that we support it. This request was granted, and to this day the head of True Light Seminary is Miss Noyes. In 1909, as many as 20,819 copies of missionary letters went out from our office, and a special secretary is needed to oversee their distribution.

Let me say, in passing, that it was on that same day when the first missionary letter was received that the name of Mrs. Turner was proposed as Manager—a day fraught with blessing for many!

This brings us to our Presidents. There have been but three—alas! that the one who planned for this meeting is no longer with us! Mrs. W. E. Schenck, a forceful and discerning woman, was elected at the first organized meeting, and continued in office twenty years. Mrs. C. P. Turner, her successor, retired after fourteen years from the *Presidency*, but, to our joy, not from anything else. Shoulder to shoulder has she worked with us, and we feel her influence in every undertaking. Mrs. Charles N. Thorpe, for twenty years a foreign secretary, was elected President in 1904, and her death one month ago has left our hearts too freshly wounded for speech.

Our officers for the most part have served us long as well as faithfully. *Mrs. Fishburn* was Treasurer

from 1875 to 1902, a term of twenty-seven years. *Mrs. S. C. Perkins*, one of our founders, held many offices in the thirty years before her death. Her "Story of Twenty-five years" is the history of our first quarter-century, and has been, as you may believe, of great help in preparing this paper. *Mrs. R. H. Allen*, Vice-President, was a great power, and is held in loving memory. *Mrs. D. R. Posey*, from her election in 1874 to her retirement in 1905, filled many places of responsibility, and to her and *Mrs. Fishburn* as Honorary Officers we often turn for information and advice. *Mrs. A. L. Massey*, elected in 1873, worked continuously till this year, when she was bidden to her reward. The only surviving charter member of the Board is *Mrs. Z. M. Humphrey*, who still holds us dear, though a change of residence early severed her connection as an officer. Do we not see her influence and name in the Humphrey Band of this church,* which in 1906 celebrated its twenty-fifth birthday (never having omitted a regular meeting), and which can boast that four missionaries have gone out from its ranks!

Before we leave the subject of our officers, I appeal to those of you who have held office even as long as seven years in this Board—does it not seem as seven days for the love you bear toward it?

In order to hold property and to strengthen the organization, a charter was obtained in 1883, but long

* First Church, Walnut Hills, Cincinnati.

before that, through the generosity of the Board of Publication, we "read our title clear" to the rooms in which we had set up housekeeping. Before we were two years old the Board of Publication gave us rooms rent-free, first at 1334 Chestnut Street, where Rooms 31 and 25 meant much to us and our missionaries, and since 1898 at the Witherspoon Building, 1319 Walnut Street, where in Rooms 501, 502 and 503, we delight to welcome those of you who call. Here any day you are likely to meet your officers, but you are certain to do so on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at the meeting of the Directors and at the prayer meeting—the latter, as I reminded you, an institution of thirty-six years' standing. *Every* Tuesday sees the members of the Executive Committee at the Witherspoon Building—and a vision of a green table comes to me whose magic circle leaves no one who touches it the same!

Do not imagine that your secretaries sit at 501 Witherspoon Building and draw salaries. All officers except the Treasurer are unsalaried, and in their homes, to which your letters are forwarded, they have just such cares as have the rest of you.

In 1872, the first Presbyterian Society was organized, and (to quote again from Mrs. S. C. Perkins) "Many a good Presbyterian woman hardly knew what a Presbytery was until there arose a talk about this new kind of a society." Since then we have added, subtracted, multiplied and divided Presbyterian Socie-

ties, until we now stand at seventy-seven. In 1885, and again in 1908, for good and sufficient reasons, three Presbyterial Societies were transferred to the New York Women's Board. In 1886, the North Pacific, and in 1889 the Occidental Branches were organized into separate Boards, with whom, together with the three other Women's Boards, we have vital connection by means of a Central Committee. In 1908, the union of the Cumberland Church with our own added new Presbyterial Societies, and brought the number up to the seventy-seven.

There have also been subtraction and addition in our foreign field—missions among the North American Indians were transferred to the Home Board in 1873 (just after we had sent them a gift of a barrel of candy, too!), and the Spanish War in 1898 laid the Philippines on our doorstep. At present we support work in twelve countries—India, China, Japan, Persia, West Africa, Siam and Laos, Syria, South America, Mexico, Korea, Philippines, and among the Chinese and Japanese in California.

Watch how swiftly our periodicals evolved. Six months after our organization, *Woman's Work for Woman*, a quarterly, was launched, the Board of the Northwest joining with us in its publication. The next year it changed to a bi-monthly, and in 1875 to a monthly, with a subscription list of 10,000. Ten years later it became the organ of all the Women's Boards, and was moved to New York. This year its

gifted Miss Parsons celebrates the twenty-fifth year of her editorship by attending the World's Conference on Missions at Edinburgh.

As to leaflets, the first one was published in 1872, and the Second Annual Report gives a list of nine publications. The output of leaflets now averages more than 100,000 yearly, filling a twenty-two paged catalogue.

The Young People's Work of our Board is almost as old as the Board itself. It must have begun before 1872, for the minutes that year record that one of the meetings was pleasantly interrupted by four little girls, who bore a box filled with dolls and other articles of their handiwork, made for the children of India. Perhaps it was the children's department in *Woman's Work* which inspired them, but at all events, they have been harbingers of a host of others who from Band, Circle, Christian Endeavor Society and Guild, have rallied to our aid. When *Children's Work for Children* (now *Over Sea and Land*) was started in 1875, it was housed in our offices, and was the only children's missionary magazine in the United States.

Later, a secretary was appointed to look after Young People's Work, and at present there are three such to oversee the 3,298 organizations which range from Little Light Bearers (babies) up through Bands and Christian Endeavor Societies to the studious Westminster Guilds and the Study Classes.

It was in this very city of Cincinnati that we cele-

brated our Tenth Anniversary, the Seventh Presbyterian Church giving us our birthday party. The decennial offering amounted to \$29,048.00. Philadelphia gathered the Society together for its Silver Anniversary in 1895, and we set up as our twenty-fifth milestone the Philadelphia Hospital for Women in Ambala, India.

I wish it were the province of this paper to recount those more interesting things, the doings on the foreign field. How implicated we are in all that touches our missionaries! Does each of them from time to time wrestle with plague, famine, earthquake, financial depression, political prejudice, war, massacre? We more! For have *we* not war every year, with its dread following of famine and pestilence? Always *somewhere* in our twelve countries is there disaster! Happily the missionaries' joys also are ours, and what should we do without them! Each year we give thanks for a revival somewhere. Letters fly back and forth shuttle-fashion across the seas:

"Dr. Mary Eddy wins from the Sultan the first license for a woman to practice medicine in the Turkish Empire."

"Six hundred and seventy-eight Brownies (famine orphans) baptized in one year in Kodoli, India."

"The Emperor of China is studying English."

"The walls of the West Africa churches must be removed to seat the members."

"A fiftieth, twenty-fifth and tenth anniversary celebrated in one year in Japan, Korea and the Philippines."

Then watch that Korea miracle! So discouraging were matters in 1889 that nine lines in the annual report sufficed to tell them. In 1896 it had shrunk to seven lines, and they mostly about the king. Two years later the report expands to forty-six lines, while to-day just listen to that "nation on the run to God."

God "has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call
retreat;

He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:
Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my feet!
Our God is marching on."

RACHEL LOWRIE.

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